



King County

Citizens' Advisory Commission on Homeless Encampments

CACHE Public Hearing
Monday, July 19, 2004 7:00 p.m.
St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, Bellevue
Summary of public testimony

Speaker 1 – Kirkland (Brickyard). Indicated that there are no simple solutions, however putting Tent Cities on public land will make the problem of homelessness worse. We need permanent solutions. Dumping homeless people into an unsupervised compound may be the easy path, but it is not the best path. We need to look at the root causes of homelessness for each individual. Don't create magnets for homeless people from other areas. Homelessness is a serious problem requiring serious solutions. Tent cities will encourage divisiveness in other communities, just as it has in Bothell.

Speaker 2 – Seattle. Has lived in various tent cities. Tent City is about the individual looking for what is needed for himself/herself. Problem is that people don't know each other.

Speaker 3 – Resident of TC 4. Has been homeless for a month. Believes that there is a need for tent cities. Before he became homeless, he had worked for the City of Seattle, had to leave because of health issues. Knows first hand that living on the streets is dangerous. There is safety in numbers and Tent City provides safety. Tent City has rules. He is now waiting for disability hearing, and Tent City gives him a safe place to do this. Yes to Tent Cities.

Speaker 4 – Seattle. Formerly homeless. The importance of Tent City is that it turns homeless people into formerly homeless people, wherever they come from. Tent City is an entry point to working, solving problems, getting into housing and becoming a productive member of the community. Some come from out of state. Maybe they come here with the hope of finding a job, it doesn't work out as planned and they become homeless. Tent City is a place where people can be connected. Homelessness is a national problem. Doesn't matter where they come from. When they get a job, they become taxpayers.

Speaker 5 – TC4 Resident. There are 8000 homeless people in King County and insufficient shelter. There were 38 deaths of homeless people last year, and 15 so far this year. Need to keep both shelters and tent cities going. If we shut them down, we will be causing more deaths.

Speaker 6 – TC4 Resident. Supports public land for tent cities. TC 3 has moved 41 times. This is stressful, displaces many people. Public land could be more fixed, more stable. Tent City is a good place to form community.

Speaker 7 – TC4 Resident. There is a need for Tent City, especially for couples who want to stay together. Appreciates the nurses who come and give medical help (identified herself as being pregnant.)

Speaker 8 – TC4 Resident. Has been with Tent City for several weeks. (note: unable to hear his testimony)

Speaker 9 – Kirkland. Need: Tent City is not an appropriate solution and is a drain on resources. Should set up smaller facilities of no more than 20 people – no tents. These semi-permanent facilities should follow zoning and other regulations. Public land should not be used for tents. Other semi-permanent temporary units should be allowed on public land if private organizations help with the funding. Sponsoring organizations should provide liability insurance, post bonds, etc. They should be there for a fixed time. There should be no tolerance for breaking rules. They should be sited two miles from schools and parks. Should be located in commercial or industrial, not residential neighborhoods.

Speaker 10 – TC4 resident. There are many people close to being homeless. Things can happen like losing a job, divorce, medical problems that push an individual into homelessness. Stereotypes of homeless are inaccurate. Getting on his feet would be harder without Tent City. The structure and responsibility in Tent City helps. Safety is offered. There is a need for Tent City. It is not a permanent solution, but it is needed for people who never thought they'd be in this situation.

Speaker 11 – Bothell. The question really is how to effectively help homeless. Does not believe in Tent Cities. Who are the homeless and why are they homeless? What is required of them? Can they look for work, do they get help?. Moving around may keep people from getting a job. Let's look at the job situation. Alcohol addiction, for example. These are bad choices - – those are choices, nobody forces someone people to take drugs or drink. People with mental problems need supervision, not tent city. If they don't have sufficient education, they need to get back in school. Tent cities are manipulative; the people in them are being used to create a new welfare agency.

Speaker 12 – Maple Valley. Need: There is a need for temporary places for people who are homeless. It needs to be safe. But no community should be forced to have them in their community. When they do exist, they shouldn't be near schools or preschool or in small isolated rural communities. Community needs to have 180 days notice so they can plan for police and EMT's.. Should be on private, not public land. If they are on public land there will be no rules and no sponsors. The homeless need to use services currently available to them.

Speaker 13 – Tent City 4 resident. There are many deaths of homeless people. Without Tent City, he may have been one of them.

Speaker 14 – TC 4 Resident. Has been homeless for 47 days. Before that, she spent 20 years in the army. There is not enough shelter space. Tent Cities are needed – wants to get back to her status of being a taxpayer like she was for so many years.

Speaker 15 – TC4 Resident. Tent cities are necessary. There is greater safety. Security is provided with executive committee. There are guidelines, a sense of home. You have to be able to get along with other people and follow rules to make it in tent city. He finished a training program but couldn't find a job. Willing to listen to others at this hearing, and hopes that people will listen to him also. It takes more than a job to not be homeless. He works every day but is still homeless.

Speaker 16 – Bellevue. Visits Tent City. Thinks they are people making the best of a bad situation. Doesn't believe it is a "fun" place to hang out. They are not loafing; many of them work. Job training takes time and money. Tent City is an emergency response to an emergency situation. It is well-organized and could continue to stay well organized on public land.

Speaker 17 – TC 4 Resident. If you live in a shelter, you can't come and go as you need to when you are working. Tent City allows access to a job. Moving a lot hurts the possibility for keeping a job.

Speaker 18 – Bothell. Disagrees that tent cities are needed. If they do exist, they shouldn't be on public property. Private property is o.k., as long as they follow due process for land use, and pay for public health and safety. We need a long term plan so there is a permanent resolution to this problem. The homeless need to become productive citizens. People must be required to use the agencies that provide help. There is no coordination. We need to be tough on those who do not follow rules of good citizenship. Homelessness is really a national issue. Every citizen has to follow due process, including churches.

Speaker 19 – Seattle. Works with homeless people. Tent City is not a permanent solution, but it is needed now. It is very difficult to find property to house tent cities. Should find some accessible property and designate it for Tent City, let them stay longer. It is too hard to move every few weeks. We need TC until there is a permanent solution. We need to take care of folks who need our help.

Speaker 20 – Shoreline. Identified herself as a King County taxpayer since 1962. Believes that tent cities are terrible, but until we are willing to be taxed to provide sufficient low income housing for all, provide workers with a living wage, etc., we need Tent Cities. They provide regulated group living and safety. Tent City is an example of self-help, which we say we believe in this country. They are doing what they need to do for themselves. Public land is preferable because the problem belongs to all of us. Private land is fine also. Two weeks notification of surrounding community is sufficient.

Speaker 21 – Bothell (unincorporated King County). Concerned about the neighborhood. They were taken by surprise with the tent city situation. There have been many police reports. SHARE/WHEEL would like to stay longer. Do not help the homeless by injuring neighbors. There have been instances of door knocking, profanity, screaming. Suggested a home sharing program. Save neighborhoods from having tent cities permanently. It has damaged the neighborhood, for example, the apartment building across from Brickyard is having trouble renting.

Speaker 22 – Redmond. Was homeless as a young man, and is now a homeowner. Lives above 60 acres of public land that has been leased as soccer fields for 30 years. Gliders have access to public land while others don't. So question is how do we use our public land? Who gets access to it and who doesn't? Would like to work on this issue.

Speaker 23 – Shoreline. There is a need for some type of homeless shelters. Affordable housing is scarce. Section 8 has been cut. Minimum wage workers can't afford housing. Doesn't seem to be another alternative to tent cities at the moment. The homeless aren't going away. It is better if they are in a safe location, supervise themselves. It is good for them to have privacy and security as they can in Tent City. Could Fircrest be renovated into temporary housing for the homeless? We have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of people.

Speaker 24 – Seattle. Identified himself as director of Operation Nightwatch, a "dispatch service" for homeless persons at night. They see 100-150 people per night. There comes a time each month when they have no more shelter beds to send them to. He believes that the arguments being used against Tent Cities are the same arguments that were used about people of color moving into neighborhoods in the 60's. There is a street count of homeless people every year which finds 1800 to 2000 people sleeping on the streets. Less than one percent of the people he serves have downtown Seattle zip codes as their last permanent address. The suburbs have exported many more people to homelessness than they have imported through Tent City.

Speaker 25 – Bothell. Supports Tent City. Tent City provides a community for its residents. Provides for many of the needs that these folks have such as safety, responsibility, accountability and support. They must follow rules and be accountable to each other. It is a strong community where people can count on each other. This is a reflection of the values held by our community.. Organization of Tent City helps people identify their needs and brings awareness. It is easy to know how to reach out and support them. If there was a better place, they would be there. Don't disband unless a better alternative is in place.

Speaker 26 – Bothell. Supports Tent City. It is obviously necessary, since there are not enough long term solutions in place. Would like to see property taxes go to help homeless. Supports use of public land and longer term occupancy.

Speaker 27 – Seattle and Brier. Lots of great ideas in the hearing tonight. He would like to change the term "homeless" to "people without a roof over their head." Supports use of both public and private land. There are many people on the brink of homelessness – it is an emergency. Many people welcome the homeless. St. Mark's cathedral has hosted them many times, and has never had any significant problems. The only problem has been uncomfortable neighbors.

Speaker 28 – May Valley (SKC). Was police officer in Seattle and had experience with homeless people in Pioneer Square many years ago. The government imposes too many restrictions. Helps people, but his help is called "substandard housing." There are lots of homeless people in rural areas. Homeless are caught in the riptide of government regulation. Lots of opportunity to help is barricaded by government regulation.

Speaker 29 – Bothell. We need to help those who are mentally ill or disabled. We need to help those who are older but they should not be in a tent city. Young able bodied need to get off their duffs.

Speaker 30 – Bellevue. People are too isolated. Supports Tent City and supports the use of public land. Described the experience of a friend of hers who could have become homeless after losing a nursing career do to serious health issues.

Speaker 31– Seattle. Worked for 30 years with homeless and poor people. Learned that people don't choose homelessness. Working with them, reasons become clear. Those of us who have homes have a responsibility to those who don't. Tent City is not an ideal solution, but it is a temporary necessity. It is an excellent use of public or private land. Responsibility of churches to step forward. At the same time, we need to look at increasing permanent low income housing.

Speaker 32 – Bothell. Submitted copies of a joint pastoral letter from several Bothell pastors. Every week, people come to her church in Bothell asking for shelter. Resources are limited. Responding to these people is the responsibility of both government and faith community. Resources are not as available as resource lists seem to show. Both public and private land should be used. Do not put unreasonable restrictions on faith communities who want to serve the homeless.

Speaker 33 – Bellevue. Works with congregations for the homeless. They provide three meals a day, roof over head for a number of homeless people. Many church congregations are involved. They have had success for 10 years. There is lots of money on Eastside, but there is a great deal of poverty as well.

Speaker 34 – Bothell. No answers, but questions. What are the qualities of a good community and how do these qualities relate to homeless? What is a home? Why can Bothell be my home, and not other peoples' home?

Speaker 35 – Bothell. Tent City was forced on the Bothell community. Should look to New York City, not Portland as an example of how to help the homeless. In New York, they provided true assistance. Shelter is a small part of overall problem. Thirty percent of the homeless have alcohol and drug problems, thirty percent are mentally ill. Public notification of a couple of weeks so it can be discussed. Public land should not be used. Should help those individuals who want to find a job. Shuffling people around in camps does not help. Each person's situation can be addressed. Turned to talk to the homeless people in the crowd, saying: "A series of bad decisions have made you become homeless. You can't come and squat on my land."

Speaker 36 – Bothell. Modeling what it means to be a compassionate adult to her children by helping in Tent City. Is comfortable with TC and SHARE/WHEEL. Process is stable. Residents form part of a community that requires their participation. Supports concept of Tent City and SHARE/WHEEL model. Shared responsibility between government and private/ church. Little concern about siting near a school. Chose to believe best about Tent City and has not been disappointed.

Speaker 37 – Seattle. There is an excellent network of services for the homeless. Thinks it is wrong that there is no representative of homeless people on the commission- this negates the value of the commission. Had a five page written memo for the Commission. Believes that Tent City is an important part of the network of services. Important that it allows couples. Two weeks public notice is sufficient. Public and private land should both be used.

Speaker 38 – Bothell. Talked about the number of homeless in KC and that many of them are chronically homeless. SHARE/WHEEL doesn't have statistic of how many people moved out of Tent City into a better situation so we don't know if it really helps. There is no requirement to get help. Believes that private, not public land should be used because with private land there will be more restrictions on how to help people. Dignity Village in Portland is a problem because now nobody wants to leave. Goal should be to help people move along. Need open process. In Bothell they pretended to have an emergency, but there really wasn't one.. Wants to "help our own." – not outsiders.

Speaker 39 – Bothell. Over 100 police contacts, many arrests. There has been a negative attack on the community. Negative impact on Bothell. Has nothing against the homeless, but they need more help than what they're getting in Tent City. Accountability, responsibility – Tent City needs to show that people are truly being helped. If they have alcohol or drug problems, they need treatment. Same with health issues, jobs and other needs. We have the resources to provide that help.

Speaker 40 – Bothell. Things are not what they seem. Many mischaracterizations. Lots of accusations, lots of acrimony. The pastoral letters that were released today are full of inaccuracies and misrepresentations. The Commission needs to sift through this and figure out what is true. Private land should be used, not public. Tent City needs to be more rigidly run. They need a better methodology. The community needs to protect children and find the "right" place for these places. Does not want a problem institutionalized, wants a solution institutionalized. There is plenty of low income housing available. They are moving people into housing. Why are they having success, when other leaders and providers aren't?

Speaker 41 – Medina. Tent Cities are an outrage. They should be parked in blighted land in Seattle, preferably converted warehouses in an industrial area.

Speaker 42 – Bellevue. Doesn't believe that you can't have a job and not afford housing. (He did it when he was in grad school.) Public land is out of the question. Private land should be a solution. Churches are a good solution. Paying more for taxes – county doesn't have unlimited funds.

Summary

Speakers:	Tent City Residents	10
	Seattle	6
	Kirkland	2
	Bothell	12
	Maple Valley	1
	Bellevue	4
	Redmond	1
	Shoreline	2
	May Valley	1
	Medina	1
	Unknown	2